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Regards of
H. C. Hovey.

THE JOY OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY.

A SERMON

By REV. EDWARD F. WILLIAMS, D. D.

THE JOY OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY.

A SERMON

DELIVERED IN THE

Second Congregational Church,

MINNEAPOLIS.

DECEMBER 4TH, 1883.

At the Installation of Rev. Horace C. Hovey, D. D.

By REV. EDWARD F. WILLIAMS, D. D.

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MINNEAPOLIS, MINN., December 10th, 1883.

REV. E. F. WILLIAMS, D. D., Chicago, Ills.

DEAR SIR:—In behalf of the Second Congregational Church and Society, we hereby request for publication a copy of your sermon on the occasion of Dr. Hovey's installation; hoping that its persual may increase, in the experience of many readers, their joy in Christian service.

With kind regards, yours very truly,

CHARLES E. YOUNG,
OSMYN B. KING,
CHARLES S. BARDWELL,
EZRA L. SMITH, } Committee.

To Messrs. Charles E. Young, Osmyn B. King, Charles S. Bardwell and Ezra L. Smith, Committee of the Second Congregational Church and Society, Minneapolis, Minn.

GENTLEMEN:—Your note of December 10th, asking for a copy of the sermon delivered by me, December 4th, at Dr. Hovey's installation, is received, and in compliance with your request, a copy is placed in your hands.

Yours very truly,

E. F. WILLIAMS.

CHICAGO, ILLS. December 13th, 1883.

THE JOY OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY.

I TIMOTHY, I : 11-12. According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust. And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry.

The theme suggested by these glowing words is thankfulness for being in the Christian Ministry; or, as I prefer to express it for treatment at this time,

THE JOY OF THE CHRISTIAN SERVICE.

For ministry is service, and the value of service, public or private, is in its quality rather than in its extent, in the spirit with which it is rendered rather than in its amount and variety. So too, the value of Christian service depends almost wholly upon its spirit—the grateful affection, the loving trust, the faithful devotion with which obligations to the present or the future are discharged. I speak of obligations to the future, because the Christian minister is not only *heir* of all the *past*, he is *debtor* to all *that is to come*. To this ministry, this service in behalf of the race, all believers, I take it, belong, and in Christ's name, as "ambassadors for Christ," are permitted and required to publish the "glad tidings" to their fellow-men.

It is the joy of this service, as seen in a few of its many aspects, that we are now to consider. And here let me remind those who are so constituted that they cannot be content unless in the way of becoming great, that the path to greatness, according to our Lord, is through self-denial and self-forgetfulness. "Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you let him be

your servant; even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."

Furthermore, in devoting ourselves to this service, we are imitating the Master, who found His happiness in doing the will of the Father, and in knowing that He was the object of the Father's approval and affection.

Passing from these preliminary statements, it is evident to us all, that the Apostle whose words to Timothy form the text, found his greatest joy in the Christian ministry. For having been called to this ministry he was profoundly grateful, not because of the prominence it gave him, setting him apart from or above his fellow-men, but because he remembered what his previous life had been, the life of "a blasphemer, a persecutor and injurious," and that in his blindness, and rage he had imagined himself to be doing God service in destroying his saints. If memory of the past made him humble it made him grateful as well. It gave vividness and emphasis to that "gospel of glory" which he preached, to the "unspeakable riches" of that divine grace whose power he had felt. He could not forget that the Lord Jesus had forgiven him, had put him into the ministry irrespective of personal merit, and had set the seal of a divine approval upon his labors. He rejoiced that through obedience to the "heavenly vision" he could truthfully say, that although "less than all the saints," "not meet to be called an apostle," as "one born out of due time" the Lord had called him into His service, and had counted him faithful in it, foreseeing that in zeal and efficiency he would outstrip even the chiefest of the Apostles, "in labors more abundant, in deaths oft," never counting life dear if he might finish his course with joy, and testify to Jew and Greek to the ends of the earth, of the blessedness of that gospel which is "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." This gospel he could not help preaching. "Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is me if I preach not the gospel." He knew how to sympathize with the prophet to whom command and promise came in a very dark period of Israel's history.

"Gird up thy loins and arise and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces lest I confound thee before them, for behold, I have made thee this day a fenced city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls against the whole land, against the Kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land, and they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee, for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee." What cheer and hope in words like these! Yet the apostle remembered that, when discouraged over what seemed to be the failure of his mission, the faithful Jeremiah had said, "I will not make mention of the Lord, nor speak any more in his name," but had found silence impossible, for "His word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with my forbearing and could not stay."

Neither could Paul, nor Peter, nor John, nor Luther, whose restatement of gospel grace has been the salvation of the modern world. Would that we, too, were weary with our forbearing, that with burning words of sympathy and love, and with clear vision of the value and power of God's message through the Son, we might feel the necessity laid upon us of preaching salvation to lost men, the woe if we preach it not. Would that gospel heralds might be multiplied till the nations that sit in darkness see the "great light," and in the joy of the "new birth" break forth into the "new song."

The cry is for men; for the prairies and the mountains, for country and city; for men who can bring comfort and peace and purity to those who dwell in homes of poverty and vice, who can awaken the consciences of those who are in danger of perishing from indifference, who can reach the millions of those who have never heard of Christ, or having heard, know nothing of the "power of an endless life." The cry is for men: we hear it everywhere. Men with soul on fire and lips purified with coals from the heavenly altar; men who will obey God at whatever risk; who will neither tremble at a tyrant's threat nor yield to fashion's flattery; who will speak the things they "have seen and heard," "whether men will hear or forbear."

The men we need must be under this controlling Christian purpose. The world is waiting for the gospel. And what a world this would be were the gospel everywhere preached and accepted; were hearts and homes, learning and religion, labor and pleasure, law and government, sanctified by the Spirit of Christ. Unconsciously perhaps, yet truly, do men feel their need of the gospel life. Not only from every nation outside the pale of Christendom does the cry for help come, as it came to Paul from Macedonia; the hundreds of thousands who each year seek a home in this new world, appeal to us for a sympathy and a ministry which Christian people alone can give. To this call how few respond? Hard as it is to obtain money for Christian service abroad or at home, the money is more easily secured than the men. "The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that He would send forth laborers into his harvest."

Do we doubt our authority to go forth? "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." "All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth." "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations." "Lo I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Why wonder that Paul, with such authority and promise as this back of him, could say, when his work was almost over, "I know whom I have believed," or that modern missionaries, from Judson to Moffatt, have died in full confidence that their words would bring forth fruit, that the lands in which they labored would become vocal with praise unto God! This assurance of hope is for us. Would that with the zeal of prophet and apostle we might respond to the divine call, and urge men everywhere to trust Him whom to trust is to live.

If we rejoice in the Christian service as Paul did, because called to it, and called to it irrespective of merit, we may rejoice also in the message we are commissioned to deliver. It is good tidings; tidings of great joy; tidings from heaven to earth; from the world of life to the world of death; from God to man. And the glory of this message is in the fact that it centers upon the person and work of Jesus Christ, who though "equal

with God," "took upon him the form of a servant, and being found in fashion as a man, humbled himself unto death, even the death of the cross," and thus "abolished death and brought life and immortality to light."

The Apostle rejoiced in his ministry more heartily than we do to-day, chiefly, I think, because he realized more fully than we do, the grandeur of the person and work which were the substance of his message. He spoke of the prophetic Christ, the Messiah for whose coming the devout Jewish heart had yearned through the centuries, who had formed the basis of hope in prophecy and ritual, and in whose appearance individual and national anticipation were to be fully realized. He spoke of the historic Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, in whose brief earthly ministry all truth and goodness had been revealed, whose marvelous teaching, by the wayside, on the sea, in field and town, in synagogue and temple, in the privacy of the home, in the presence of the surging multitude, by miracle, parable, fervent discourse, and simple conversation had touched men's hearts, and touched them so powerfully that unfeeling officers of the law were compelled to say, "never man spake like this man." And not alone upon his teachings did Paul dwell, but also upon the spirit of sacrifice which brought him into the world and led him to die for the world. In that death the Apostle found "the propitiation for our sins," and in his resurrection from the dead, the pledge and assurance of the resurrection of his followers. Nor did his thought end here. The kingdom of which Christ spoke was no kingdom of earthly glory, limited by an earthly horizon. The culmination of its blessedness is in the ages to come, when, having gathered together his own, our Lord "shall have delivered up the kingdom to his Father," and every foe to his authority shall have been destroyed forever.

It was a living Christ that Paul preached. The atoning work was completed. That was the historic fact upon which his teachings rested. In speaking of that he was never weary. Yet his thought soared beyond the earthly work to the risen Christ, the glorified Christ, the Christ at the right hand on

high, the Christ who had met him on the way to Damascus, whose constant presence and help were the source of his power and joy. This was the Christ upon whom he loved to dwell, and whom he delighted to serve. A message from such a being and about such a being, it was the joy of his life to give. Hence the variety of form in which it appears, the effort to exhaust the power of language adequately to set it forth.

But not only were the call to the Christian ministry and the message entrusted to him in it, a source of joy to the Apostle, he rejoiced still more, as we must rejoice with him, in knowing that the message that Christ desired him to give, was just the message which men needed to hear.

He had no doubt that men were lost; that apart from Christ they would never break away from the thralldom of sin; that they could enter into life only through the regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit, and that this Spirit would come to them only as they heard of Christ at the lips of the living preacher. By the love he bore his Lord, by the love he bore his fellow men for whom that Lord had died, was he carried forward as by a mighty impulse to tell them of deliverance within their reach.

I do not think that Paul failed to appreciate the dignity of human nature. At any rate, he looked upon man as worth saving. He seems most earnestly to have desired that the great powers with which others claimed that he had been endowed might be developed according to their Creator's intentions and employed in their Creator's service. That he was not unmindful of man's intellectual and moral capacity, we may safely affirm. There were enterprise, ambition, thought, marvellous creations of poetry and art even in his day. In discharging the obligations of his ministry he sought the centers of power, the centers of learning, philosophy, superstition, commerce, political authority, and sought them as one who knew what men are capable of becoming and doing, as appreciating the fact that they are in the image of God, and that when this image is restored through faith in Christ, there are no limits to their moral and spiritual attainments or to the possibilities of service here

or hereafter. Knowing what man was intended to be, and what through the gospel he might easily become, yet recognizing his need, Paul was full of joy that one so careless and bitter as he had been was counted worthy to go to him with offers of pardon and eternal life.

How must the angels wonder that in a world like ours, with perishing men on every side, any tongue can be silent on themes like these, that in preaching the gospel any heart should fail to find continuing and overwhelming joy! For we know, as Paul knew, that men need the gospel, that they need the living Christ, the life-giving influence, the abiding presence of the Spirit of God. Has not "the bitter cry of outcast London" reached our ears? Have we not heard a similar cry from Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Constantinople, the overgrown cities of the East, nay, from the newer cities of our own land, a cry for "the living bread that cometh down from heaven," for "the living water" of which if a man drink he shall thirst no more forever?

And the triumphs of the gospel, are they not as great and as rewarding among the hardened and abandoned of our own day, as they were in the outcast Rome or Antioch of Paul's day? Why doubt the power of Christ's mercy to save? How can we doubt in the presence of the accumulated testimony of nineteen centuries? How can we doubt when we have seen, again and again, the demons of sin cast out, and the helpless victim sitting at the feet of Jesus, "clothed, and in his right mind?" How can we doubt, when we ourselves can say with the persecuted man of gospel story, "one thing I know, that whereas I was blind now I see?" For us, personal experience of an uplifting and sustaining faith, of refreshing communion with the Lord, has proved that nothing short of Christ and his salvation can bring peace into our souls, or give success to our efforts in behalf of men.

It is this salvation which we are to preach; salvation in Christ and by Christ; the salvation of every man who hears and accepts our testimony concerning Christ. What have we in place of this salvation? For shall we substitute culture, the refinements of an elegant civilization, ethics, moral purposes

formed only to be broken? These have had faithful trial, and with what disappointment and moral disaster! Mere natural virtues are not enough; they do not bring us to God. They may lead us to seek after Him; find Him we never shall, save as we find him in Christ. "No man cometh unto the Father but by me."

What joy to go to men "dead in trespasses and sins" and tell them of life, and of life for them, to go to men who are wearing the galling chains of servitude, with the gift of freedom, to excite hope in the minds of the despondent, and disheartened, and discouraged; to fan into a flame the smouldering embers of conscience, faith, love for God; to open men's eyes to the world of beauty which lies around us when we have seen God in Christ and have made the promise of Gospel grace our own! Talk of the joy of the conqueror, the satisfaction that comes to the victor in battles, the joy of the discoverer of new lands, new forces in nature, new sources of wealth or pleasure! How far inferior to the joy of him who turns a soul from the error of its ways, and leads it back from its weary wanderings to rest and safety in the bosom of its heavenly Father! There is an irresistible fascination in Christian service. Try it and see for yourself. Take the testimony of the Sunday School teacher who has brought class after class to the Saviour, of the faithful Christian woman, who, tied up by household duties, has quietly watched for opportunities to honor the Lord, or who has given herself with the devotion of a "Sister Dora" to the alleviation of sorrow, not only in ministering to the ills of the body but to the still more serious ailments of the soul. Listen to the call. It is from the Lord. The message He bids us deliver is a message of love and life to heart-broken spirits. It is a message of reviving hope and abiding joy. How can we help rejoicing that we are counted worthy to be entrusted with such a message, that we are permitted to speak in Christ's name to those for whom Christ has died, and to speak as those who know what it is to be under the power of a faith that brings God into the soul!

Yet in delivering this message from heaven we are not for-

bidden to illustrate and enforce it with any helps that human wisdom may bring with our reach. We may point to the change that takes place in the selfish, the besotted, the sensual man, when the Spirit of God enters into his heart, to the change wrought by this same Spirit, in social life, in schools of learning, in art and science, in the enactment and enforcement of law. We may put all knowledge, past or present, under tribute as an aid in our preaching. But nothing will aid us so much, or give such efficacy to our words as the illuminating power of the Spirit. When we see the things of Christ as He shows them unto us, we can show them to others, and even with stammering tongue persuade men to accept Christ. It is the Spirit who creates enthusiasm of faith, turns cowards into heroes, sinfulness into sanctity, and calls into existence a passion for souls that not even the dread of martyrdom can weaken. It is the Spirit who gives one man power to "chase a thousand" and two, strength and skill "to put ten thousand to flight."

To have the joy of Paul in preaching the Gospel we must believe it as thoroughly as he believed it, we must have his love for the Savior, his faith and devotion, his self-forgetfulness, his ardor for truth and the righteousness of life which acceptance of the truth always brings. To be satisfied with the Christian service as he was satisfied with it we must realize its importance, its dignity, the grandeur of the moral triumphs which come to those who enter upon it without reserve. It is a glorious Gospel which we preach: "the Gospel of the glory of God" the New Version says. This glory we may bring into hearts and homes where sin and death are triumphant; to those whose lives have been filled with failures, and disappointments we may come with a revelation of everlasting blessedness in Christ, and for reward may mark the joy that takes the place of despondency, the courage with which the duties of life are taken up, the confidence with which at last the soul leaves the body to be at rest with its Lord.

True, the Christian service promises no prizes of money, or power, or social distinction. These must be sought elsewhere. Its prizes are in the divine favor, in character, in souls

saved from death, in the work of the Timothy's, the Tituses, the Augustines, the Luthers, the Zuingles, the Finneys and the Moody's, at whose conversion Satan has trembled, and through whose consecrated service millions have found their way into the kingdom of heaven. The message may not always be welcome. What of that? It is truthful. It is divine. It lays bare the condition and necessities of the human heart. It exposes the rottenness of human society, the shortcomings of pretended Saviors, the inadequacy of a gospel of learning or culture, or legalism, or asceticism, to deliver men from the bondage of sin and secure for them "the liberty of the children of God." What messages of earthly origin cannot accomplish, this message from heaven accomplishes. This message we are permitted to deliver. Its deliverance, in word and deed, in character and conduct, is the ministry into which by divine grace we have been put. For this ministry let us be thankful. In it let us rejoice. To it let us welcome every believer.

You, my Brother, have tested the power of this Gospel in your own personal experience. You have made trial of it on the battle field and in the hospital, in the homes of peace and plenty on the Atlantic coast and in the Interior. It has been the joy of your life to preach it. And now in this thriving and mighty center of the New West, you are to make trial of it again. May its truths, old yet ever fresh, be powerful in your ministrations to the pulling down of the strongholds of sin. And when your earthly service is ended, may you receive the Crown of Life that fadeth not away.

